

# Brisbane: 100% Organic West End

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## Travel

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Date: November 20<sup>th</sup> 2010

It took me five years to reach Brisbane from Kathmandu. It is not because I went there by foot, it is because five years ago I bumped into an Australian girl whom I travelled for a month across Northern India, supposedly being on our way to Nepal. It has been a while since I left the station in New Delhi, after not having slept a wink and being tormented with doubt, cancelling my flight to Kathmandu and leaving my transcendental voyage partner behind. The circumstances forced me to come back home while the panic caused by the political events in Nepal took control of my 23 year old mind. I had to make a decision. I made it: I had to get back and have the Annapourna part done in a few years. I told Neti goodbye and headed back to the station. My blood was heavily pulsing in my temples, my breath seemed truly burdensome, and I felt very disappointed with myself abandoning a friend in need. I guess that was it. I was probably lazy and panicked, or maybe more responsible than I thought. That is why, in that very moment, I swore I would get back. What I did, three years later: Kathmandu, Annapourna Trek. What I also did, five years later: Neti and Brisbane, West End.

## West End Story

In Brisbane, I landed straight into an organic café, if that rings you a bell. The four Australian dollars spent for an organic coffee moved me to a past which had the chance to be resuscitated in order to complete a circle. Or not. Anyway, all I knew was that I had not seen Neti for five years and I had no idea what to expect for. Was she still a yoga enthusiast, had she attended any Vipassana lecture since then, was she still a caseworker, how would we manage to live together after all that time? I had all those doubts crossing through my mind because every time I meet a friend I have not seen for a long time, I enter a state of uncertainty and anxiety, as I am to perform for an audition at a music highschool. I would rather not face that sort of moods



**EDITURA PENTRU LITERATURĂ CONTEMPORANĂ**

**CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE PRESS**

and maybe even avoid contact, but the feeling that I will regret not having met with these people at the end of the world, annoys me a little bit, and brings me back in some sort of peace of mind. There is nothing wrong going to happen.

Those were my thoughts when I had arrived at 18, Vultures Street, in front of a pale pink fenced yard and a door which had *Maison (fr.)* written on it. Thinking that maybe Neti planned to study French, I sat in front of the door of the *maison*, maintaining my image of *Turtle Diary*. The Australian blonde shows up at one moment, unchanged, driving a more or less crumbled car, which starts honking every time you lock or unlock it. The same clothes with Tibetan influences, the same good fairy glance of an ageless teenager. We greet as if we have not seen each other for merely a few months and we move down to Neti's rented apartment. We share the same "*you didn't change at all*" opinion. And maybe nothing changed, somehow. Apparently, not even the look of the room. The spider webs all around the court and the hammock reminded me of that tranquil ambience in India, and of the beaches on the seaside. The apartment looked like an extension of the garden, with an Asian touch: a sitar in the corner, many vivid coloured shawls, a yoga mat. It felt like home. A West End replica of my flat in Timisoara.

I am totally relaxed, partly because Neti is very calm and sincere. It makes me really comfortable. Besides, a lot of friendly creatures come into view at nearby windows, it all looks like an utopic student community. It is just that everyone is above 25 and employed quite a few years ago. In fact, the West End of Brisbane has the appearance of Timisoara. Everybody knows everybody, they're all hugging each other, and it seems that they were all classmates at one moment. I carefully lay my three days backpack in one of the corners of the temple-like room and we start preparing to go out and meet Neti's friends. She changes her clothes, putting a blue scarf on. I stick to my travel outfit. I have no extended gear and that became a bit frustrating lately because every time I get out I am struck by some sort of nostalgia about the wardrobe I left home or in whatever garage it could be at the moment. Anyway, in Brisbane I did not feel embarrassed in any way because I had my backpack stuffed with the winter clothes I wore in South America. Apparently everyone's outfit seemed to be either hand-me-down clothes or something bought from a small South Asian store or excessively worn. You encounter about two typologies in West End: dreadlocks and backpackers. Apart from that, there are yoga studios everywhere, nevermind organic food stores.



### The Brisbane Babes Fiasco

But let us get back to my three feminine days in Brisbane. After a few hours of getting to know the West End reality, I entirely let my host to take care of me. It was an interesting metamorphosis of the parts we used to play as travel companions. We were host and guest. Not for long, though, because we soon arrived at one of Neti's friends where we had a girl's night, something that had not happened to me in centuries. The girls had cooked organic food only, the room was decorated in the warm Asian style and the walls were covered with abstract paintings made by one of the girls, which happened to be a very nice *kiwi*. We were breathing a familiar air. Like when I was home. I had been moved.

The girls were beautiful like fairies, all calmly smiling, while the meal was being prepared with love. We sat around the table, straight on the carpet, and started talking to each other in pairs, then each of us revealed some of our own inner concerns to the others. I felt I was carried somewhere in the past when I used to hang around with the six girls of my neighbours all day long, at night I was at home with my folks, across the road, when we used to call each other over the fence and play games on the street. I was twenty-eight but nothing stopped me to feel as if I was fifteen. I liked the girls' spirit, though I found it hard to be so straightforward right from the start. I was hindered a bit as I sensed the girls were trying so hard to be in harmony with all things around them. I was terrified lest I should say something wrong or let a four-letter word slip (I had just finished reading *The Tasmanian Babes Fiasco*, a book filled with aussie slang, or humorous obscenities, to put it bluntly, which kept coming into my mind). Maybe it was only in my timorous mind, though, because it's not so easy to step out into the real world after having interacted with one and the same human species for weeks. I tried to relax and get into their 100% organic girls game.

One of the girls caught my eye. She had graduated Visual Arts at Brisbane University and she had just had an exhibition. She looked as she were from another galaxy. In fact I did not imagine she had the hobby of feeding herself. So thin that she seemed translucent. She was sad, no hidden light in her green eyes. Trouble with her boyfriend, but it standed out like a sore thumb. She had the girls' support, though, and then I remembered how important



friends are when you are in need. That was precisely what I had missed that whole year. Maybe that is why I felt so safe. No destructive energy floating in the air. No danger. Our feminine energies were upholding each other and I felt that after all those days slept over in the car I would fall down on the bed in Neti's room.

### **Food for the Soul or...**

I learned a few new things in Brisbane. First of all, the pleasure of eating healthy food. Some people are obsessed with it, others make an art out of it. A carefully cooked meal with natural ingredients, could provide one of the most seductive sensations. Although at first I felt that expressing pleasure as you were gulping some almost common food was exaggerated, I began to understand that this might help you regain one of life's greatest pleasures: eating. Not just any type of eating, but spiritual eating, however *new age* it may sound. But for reaching that sort of spiritual meal, it's recommended to skip one or two meals now and then. Some people manage to survive only on spirulina and lemon juice for a week. Now that is what I call **a real detoxification!** A truly efficient appetizer. Neti had just finished that sort of annual diet and was enjoying food sincerely, without overegging the pudding. As the dinner last night was more than enough, however organic it was, I decided to subscribe to Neti's diet, at least for one day.

We started with a moderate awakening, a few minutes of yoga and meditation. Just like in the old days, five years ago. Time seemed not to have passed at all. We were unchanged, having the same preoccupations. In good times and in bad times, I felt great anyway. Although my passion for coffee was no taboo at all, I knew that a day without caffeine would have been my greatest gift. Anyway, the rhythm was slow, life seemed easy, and who needed stimuli? I was wallowing in pleasant self-sufficiency. There were very few days when I had skipped breakfast (diet is the very last thing coming on your mind when you are on the road), but that morning I felt no need of it. I was rocking in the hammock, reading in sunlight. The spiders were spinning their webs right above my head. This is Australia, Neti said, nothing to worry about. Life was an easy dream in West End, no stress, nor danger.



The Visual Arts girl showed up at some point, suggesting a trip to the river. She had lived in a mountain village somewhere around the city and knew exactly where we should go. After an hour, while Neti had been driving her car as if had been in a slow-motion movie, we finally arrived on a farm. It was some movie director's farm and it looked like a house in a tree, lively coloured on all sides, an upright piano on the porch and a snake coiled above the living room. It all looked so artistic, I could not believe my eyes. And how simple it was! Nothing sterile, everything was in harmony with nature. Not to mention the meal prepared by our hosts, who also accommodated three Thai girls and a 22-year old Aussie from Sydney. We decide to quit fasting. I follow Neti and Sarah and we are soon at the river Neti knows by heart as she has once lived on a farm nearby. They jump quickly into the cold water while I am looking for some shelter. The place seems built by children for children, swings hanging from the trees, little wooden tables and chairs, somewhere on the other river bank. I am not thinking about snakes but I somehow feel that going around barefoot is not the best thing to do. Speaking of walking barefoot in Australia and New Zealand: everybody seems to be doing it. In fact, I soon realized I felt better without slippers. Besides, the sandals I bought in Rio left me high and dry me and I had to walk around barefoot as I was far from any place where I could buy some decent slippers from, so I chose to naturally tread on the ground. And indeed, the sublime touch of the soil is difficult to explain. Maybe it is some sort of freedom, or just going back to some sort of ancestral roots. Anyway, walking barefoot is one of the most beautiful experiences I ever had.

And one more thing: no one here seems to be frightened of cleaning or microbes. At least my friends do not sweep to make it look clean, do not tear spider webs to make it look tidy, and so on. That is why everything seems to be assimilated by a natural system. Not everywhere, of course. Because I noticed in Australia there are some edges you might be living on. Either you are all wrapped in business clothes, as in Sydney, having lunch at fancy restaurants and owning a yacht, or you eat at one of the widespread McDonalds and don't give a damn about organic food, or you're a vegan and live on spirulin and good mood. You are nobody's business, anyway. Be whoever you like as long as you do not annoy your neighbour. Compassion and tolerance. That is what I need to learn from this trip. That is my every day challenge.



**Organic Market Dub**

Zoom in. Sunday organic market. Nice people, alternative people of Brisbane. Smile and social contact. I am not relaxed. I have to interact with too many people I have not even met, acting like I have known them since I was born. I am putting myself under pressure, I am hiding, my world becomes an unceasing buzz. As Sarah plays her nomad puppeteer part, a green-eyed girl is trying to draw my attention. I feel rescued. Nice trumpet finale and puppet play but I needed something else and I did not know what exactly. The girl takes me to her brother, who looked as he was going to reveal something for me. Which he is. In that moment, all pressure evaporates and I am passing through a moment of clarity: communion, connection, truth. I felt like I had bathed in hot water for a whole day. Light and lucid. A piano and sitar jam session followed. Yes, I recalled how life was five years ago. Everything was connected then. Total focus. Brisbane brought that back to me. A sample of magic cut from a tale of fairies and green pastures. You keep being honest to yourself. Yet the struggle goes on from this point on.

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